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ABSTRACT

Speech communication instructors must think through the consequences of adopting a pedagogy of empowerment before they leap into the classroom with a handy packet of reading and pre-packaged activities. Schools are contested spheres and the struggle over what forms of authority and types of knowledge should be legitimated and transmitted to students can be seen in the demands of right-wing religious groups, feminists, ecologists, minorities, and other interest groups. Teaching with empowering students as a goal can be particularly challenging for speech communication instructors because so much of what happens in their classrooms is public. Instructors should keep student developmental levels in mind prior to trying out new critical classroom approaches. According to the theories of William Perry, students walk into class at many different places on the hierarchy of development, and instructors cannot reasonably expect all of their students to end up at the same place by the end of the semester. Incorporating sensitivity to multiculturalism into a public speaking class can be an extremely challenging endeavor. By exploring tenets of critical pedagogy and looking for opportunities to incorporate them into public speaking classrooms, instructors will be doing a service to their students. By using developmental theory as an "overlay" for critical activities, instructors can better understand their students' successes and failures. (Contains nine references.) (RS)

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The Intersection of Critical Pedagogy and Developmental Theory for Public Speaking

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INTRODUCTION

As a public speaking instructor AND a self-proclaimed "humanist," I frequently find myself facing a recurring dilemma. On the one hand, I believe in encouraging my students to find ways of speaking that will enhance their goals of empowerment. On the other hand, I often find that I feel uncomfortable about "leaving the door wide open," so to speak. If I am to announce to my class that all voices should be heard, what happens when a voice appears out of the wilderness that I find offensive? If one of my students is a White Supremacist, do they have as much of a right to share their viewpoints with the class as any of my other students?

Do I allow this student to speak on a topic I find objectionable, with hopes that the class will be able to dissect the speaker's faulty logic? Do I allow this student to speak on a topic that quite possibly could cause serious damage to the sense of community we have so intensely tried to build throughout the semester? Do I allow this student to speak, with the assumption that my other students are "adult" enough to handle such a volatile topic; when I full well know that many of them are not developmentally mature enough yet to avoid a gut-level reaction to this type of spoken violence in the classroom?

As instructors, we have heard the call for fostering multiculturalism in our classrooms. We have been asked to celebrate diversity. We have been given lots of interesting activities we can use in class. But, who has given us the

pedagogical background we need to actually teach in this manner? I personally am very much in favor of encouraging diversity in the classroom and am always pleased when my students develop a speech that allows them to better express their cultural values. I also believe, however, that we must think through the consequences of adopting the pedagogy of empowerment before we leap, underprepared, into the classroom with a handy packet of readings and pre-packaged activities.

In my experience as a teacher trainer, I have seen some very good instructors crash and burn when attempting to utilize such an approach. And, invariably the teacher blames him/herself for the failure of the day's lesson. The assumption is that if, as instructors, we were just sensitive enough and savvy enough and charismatic enough, our students would "get it." This assumption is erroneous, in my opinion.

By exploring the challenges of diversity education, this paper will attempt to specifically address issues of teaching empowerment in the public speaking classroom. I will then discuss the role student intellectual development plays in transformational instruction. Then I will highlight the intersection of student developmental concerns and the challenges of public speaking classroom instruction. And finally, I will offer some words of encouragement and general suggestions for those of us who strongly believe that it is important to find a way to import critical pedagogy into our classrooms.

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

As post-secondary education becomes more readily available to a diverse population, we have experienced a shift in the demographic composition of our colleges and universities (Orbe, 1992, p. 1). Because of this shift:

> "(a) challenge that all college instructors face is creating a classroom environment that is sensitive to all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, etc. Basic course instructors must be even more sensitive to this situation, because many students approach their course with some apprehension regardless of other factors. Being the only African-American (gay, differently abled, non-traditional, etc.) student in the class often allows anxiety levels to escalate to points of destruction (Orbe, p. 1)."

As Bruner (1966) points out, each generation must define anew the nature, direction, and aims of education to assure freedom and rationality can be attained for future generations (p. 22). For this reason, Bruner sees education as a constant process of invention. As Sprague (1991) explains, the problem doesn't lie with changing theory or knowledge bases, but with the fact that the world changes (p. 1). And our changing world requires changing our teaching.

> "The world our students will have to live in is not the one we thought we knew about. Which parts of the past must we be sure to preserve and reanimate for them? Which parts must we dare to jettison (Sprague, p. 1)?"

The status of academics as functionaries of the cultural order has recently been the focus of attention (Kecht, 1992, p. 2). Both the right and left wing have expressed disenchantment with a profession that has postulated esoteric theories, yet has neglected its duty to impart knowledge and skills to students

(Kecht).

> "We need to ask ourselves whether we want to be like Gramsci's 'traditional' intellectuals, trying to uphold the myth of social autonomy and thus concealing any attachment to historical social formations, or whether we want to be 'organic' intellectuals, seeing our professional activities as welded to political acts and thus sustaining a culturally adversarial position that is actually inscribed in the term 'criticism.' As teachers and scholars, we are bearers of critical knowledge that should empower others to make sense of their position in the worlds, become alert to the ideological workings of the cultural process, discover the neglected or suppressed aspects of the tradition, and seize the initiative to disrupt the hegemonic order (Kecht, p. 7)."

Schools are contested spheres and the struggle over what forms of authority and types of knowledge should be legitimated and transmitted to students can be seen in the demands of right-wing religious groups, feminists, ecologists, minorities, and other interest groups (Giroux, 1988). As Giroux claims, "schools are not neutral sites (p. 127)", and therefore, as instructors, we cannot consider ourselves "neutral" either. As educators, we contribute to the construction of knowledge and the consumption and perpetuation of particular educational practices (Davilla, 1992, p. 4). We bring to our classrooms our values, our politics and our epistemologies, which we convey through our communication (Davilla).

In order to make the political more pedagogical, we must utilize forms of pedagogy that embody emancipatory political interests (Giroux, p. 127). Giroux suggests that as transformative intellectuals we take the need to give students an active voice in their learning experiences seriously. If our goal is to transform, we need to develop a discourse that unites

the language of critique with the language of possibility (Giroux).

CHALLENGES IN EMPOWERING THE SPEECH CLASS

Teaching with empowering students as a goal can be particularly challenging for those of us in speech communication because so much of what happens in our classrooms is public. Written essays are mainly dialogues between teacher and student; but speeches are dialogues with everyone in the classroom. On the one hand, this offers the public speaking instructor a perfect opportunity to encourage communication between all voices in the classroom. On the other hand, the potential for chaos and hurt loom large.

> "How tragic if ours were the generation of communication instructors that let die the two thousand year old heritage of rhetorical reason as it takes form in the two hundred year old heritage of American civic humanism! Is not this exactly the time to become tenacious and find ways to 'put the public back in public speaking' against all cultural odds? But how equally tragic if we were to be the generation that clung nostalgically to outmoded elitist forms of public discourse that exclude from public life the voices we most need to hear (Sprague, p. 2)!"

As Sprague points out, public life and public speaking instruction are enriched by teaching that emphasizes the interplay of public and private life (p. 2). She claims that we have not addressed the topic of public speaking instruction in a changing public sphere because it brings us face-to-face with matters of pedagogy. According to Sprague, public life and public speaking instruction are enhanced by instruction that recognizes the interplay of public and private life (p. 2).

"And so, the curricular question we raise is, given what

> public speaking has become, or appears to be becoming, what should we teach students about it? This raises the inevitable political question: What is the relationship of academic knowledge to the larger social milieu (Sprague, p. 3)?"

STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

Up to this point, we have explored the motivation behind incorporating critical pedagogy into the public speaking classroom. However, does the importation of critical theory into our classrooms necessitate completely discarding more traditional approaches to classroom instruction? I would argue that there is value in trying to find a blend between critical pedagogy and developmental theory. I realize that many instructors who practice critical pedagogy would disagree with this entanglement. After all, theories of development are linked to more conservative institutional practices. However, by exploring the intersection of critical pedagogy and developmental theory, it is possible to glimpse some of the reasons behind the success or failure of attempts to foster empowerment in the public speaking classroom.

In my opinion, it is beneficial to keep student developmental levels in mind prior to trying out new critical classroom approaches. Although all educators may not agree when it comes to the specifics of the student intellectual development hierarchy, it is safe to say that most educators believe learning takes place in phases. It seems fruitful, therefore, to look at some stages of intellectual development and use them as a template to assist us in understanding how to best approach

attempts at empowerment in the classroom.

One of the most well-accepted theories of student intellectual development was created by William Perry and his colleagues. Perry interviewed college students and asked them what experiences from their past year in school stood out for them (Magolda & Porterfield, 1986). Based on this data, Perry outlined his theory of intellectual and ethical development (Magolda & Porterfield). What he found was that not all students began their university career on equal moral and intellectual footing.

> "...we had been impressed with the variety of the ways in which the students responded to the relativism which permeates the intellectual and social atmosphere of a pluralistic university...a few seemed to find the notion of multiple frames of reference wholly unintelligible. Others responded with violent shock to their confrontation in dormitory bull sessions, or in their academic work...Others experienced a joyful sense of liberation. There were also students, apparently increasing in number in the years following World War II, who seemed to come to college already habituated to a notion of man's knowledge as relative and who seemed to be in full exploration of the modes of thinking (Perry, 1970, pp. 3-4)."

Perry's scale of development describes students progressing through holistic and increasingly integrated structures (Magolda & Porterfield). There are nine hierarchical and integrative positions in Perry's scheme:

> 1. BASIC DUALITY: The outlook is one in which the world of knowledge, conduct and value is divided. A person construes all issues of truth and morality in the terms of a sweeping and unconsidered differentiation between in-group vs. out-group (Perry, p. 59).
>
> 2. MULTIPLICITY PRE-LEGITIMATE: In this situation, if a student revolts against "the Establishment" before they have familiarized themselves with the analytical and integrative skills of relativistic thinking, the only place they can

take their stand is in an absolutism (Perry, pp. 72-73).

3. MULTIPLICITY SUBORDINATE: So far Authority has been perceived as grading on amount of rightness, achieved by honest hard work. But in the uncertainty of authorized Multiplicity, coupled with a freedom that leaves "amount" of work "up to you" and Authority ignorant of how much you do, rightness and hard work vanish as standards (Perry, pp. 89-90).

4. MULTIPLICITY CORRELATE OR RELATIVISM SUBORDINATE: A student with a bit of gumption will recognize a playground when he or she sees one. As long as the area of ambiguity remains, he or she will have a right to his/her own opinion, and They will have no right to label it wrong (Perry, p. 97).

5. RELATIVISM CORRELATE, COMPETING OR DIFFUSE: In Position 4, the student had assimilated Multiplicity and Relativism into the framework of a world they still assumed to be dualistic. In Position 6 they will apprehend the implications of personal choice in a world they assume to be relativist. This revolution is precipitated by the failure of a dualistic framework to assimilate the expanding generalization of Relativism (Perry, pp. 109-110).

6. COMMITMENT FORESEEN: The word "commitment," refers to affirmation: in all the plurality of the relativistic world -- truths, relationships, purposes, activities, and cares, in all their contexts -- one affirms what is one's own. Commitments require the courage of responsibility, and presuppose an acceptance of human limits, including the limits of reason (Perry, p. 135).

7, 8, AND 9: INITIAL COMMITMENT; ORIENTATION IN IMPLICATIONS OF COMMITMENT; DEVELOPING COMMITMENTS: Position 7 describes that state in a student's life in which they have undertaken to decide on their own responsibility who they are, or who they will become in some major area of their life. Position 8 describes a level of experience in which the stylistic issues of Commitment have emerged in greater prominence over experimental forms. Position 9 describes a maturity in which a person has developed an experience of "who they are" in their Commitments both in their content and in their style of living them (Perry, pp. 153-154).

As Perry reminds us, a student may suspend, nullify, or reverse the process of growth (p. 177). This suspension is called "temporizing" and the student may be quite aware of the

pause, possibly waiting or gathering forces for the upcoming change. A student may also choose to exploit the detachment some of the middle positions in the hierarchy offer.

As instructors, Perry's scheme raises questions for us in regards to teaching methods. As Perry states, the scheme may be an immediate solace to an instructor because it accounts for the varied perceptions students in their classroom may have of them (p. 210). In conducting his interviews, Perry and his staff found that the most difficult instructional moment for students, and perhaps teachers seemed to occur:

> "at the transition from the conception of knowledge as a quantitative accretion of discrete rightness (including the discrete rightness of Multiplicity in which everyone has a right to his own opinion) to the conception of knowledge as the qualitative assessment of contextual observations and relationships. In approaching this point of transition the student generally misconstrues what his teacher is doing, and both suffer. It is a crucial moment; and for intelligent action, the teacher requires the clearest understanding of his, and the student's predicament (Perry, p. 210)."

Movement from one position to another involves reorganization of personal investments and even when these reorganizations appear "spontaneous," they are actually the product of considerable psychic energy (Perry). What this means is that, for the most part, a student has to want to make an intellectual change in order for the change to occur. And since our students are walking into our classrooms at many different places on the hierarchy, we cannot reasonably expect all of our students to end up at the same place by the end of the semester. We will have students who are primed to open their minds to new

views, new voices. We will also have students who have yet to acknowledge that there can be more than one reasonable point of view -- that there is rarely anything that can be categorized as strictly "right" or "wrong".

Certainly, we have a responsibility to provide a learning environment that allows for maximum intellectual growth for students. However, the fact that a particular student is not "growing" may not be something we ultimately have control over. Perry suggests that students experience the energy of their development as primarily internal (p. 51):

> "...the students' remarks revealed that the urge (to mature) was inseparable from a standard which they experienced as a sense of optimal rate of growth. This standard often varied form student to student, and also for the same student in accord with his circumstances. For example, one said: 'well, I've come a long way, and I've known for quite awhile what's next. I mean I can see it. I know what it is, all right ...(pointing to his head) up here. But I'm not ready yet, somehow, and somehow that's all right, I mean, I'll get there. I trust myself and I'll do it when I get there. Right now, thank God, nothing's rushing me. I've got enough to do (Perry, p. 51).'"

DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH TO SPEAKING

Incorporating sensitivity to multiculturalism into a public speaking class can be an extremely challenging endeavor. We are not only asking our students to focus and develop their own thoughts, but also asking them to target their speaking assignments to the diverse classroom community. As an instructor, one of my greatest frustrations is with students who fail to see the classroom as a <u>diverse</u> community. According to Brummett (1986), the problem of absolutism may be acute in public speaking classrooms where students are encouraged to speak about

what is important to them (p. 269). Student absolutism can manifest itself when orators use the assignments as an "opportunity to proselytize in the service of truths (p. 269)." Yet, as Brummett points out:

> "Such an attitude strikes at the rationale for public speaking education. Absolutists are not merely inconvenient, they are inimical to an art based on strategic audience adaptation (p. 269)."

In order to cope with absolutism in the speaking classroom, Brummett suggests teachers look at paths of student development. Although Brummett outlines four paths of development, one can see how similar they are to Perry's nine levels. What is particularly valuable about Brummett's phases of development is that they are more focused than Perry's because they address how our students develop as <u>speakers</u>. Brummett presents these four positions as stances toward the problem of difference, since that is really what absolutism and relativism are all about (p. 269).

Brummett warns against prohibition of topics in the speech classroom. That may seem like a quick fix to the instructor -- a way to keep students off topics that are inherently objectionable. However, as Brummett points out, prohibition does not address the approach toward difference that would lead the student to give an absolutist speech in the first place (p. 270). Also, there is no way to ban <u>all</u> absolutist topics. There is no way of anticipating all the ways a student can use absolutist reasoning.

Just as Perry, Brummett sees his stances as sequential. He

also sees his stances as cumulative, since each new phase transcends the earlier one by developing it further. These stances are not just stances toward speaking; they are stances about how to live with others in the world (p. 270). The following is a brief synopsis of Brummett's stances and how they relate to students giving public speeches:

> 1. ABSOLUTISM/THE SAINT: The absolutist has a story to tell, and the telling of it is paramount. Her role as a public speaker is to witness to the truth of this story, and the public speech itself is therefore a perfect vehicle for the enunciation of that truth to whomever has ears to hear. She knows that others do not think her way, but she assumes that they have come to this sorry pass through inadequate exposure to the absolute truth (p. 270).
>
> 2. AWARENESS/THE SOLDIER: Sometimes the saint becomes aware that others really do mean it when they disagree, and that they disagree in spite of, perhaps because of, having heard the absolutist's story told. At this point the saint turns militant and marches onward. The process is painful because it is a growing experience: becoming aware of real and well-founded differences in the world. The role of speaking is conquest of the other side. The guiding attitude in the stance of awareness is competition, and the focus of attention is on the message. The opponents's case is carefully studied, and weaknesses or mistakes are exploited. This student, when questioned about poor audience adaptation, will tell you how much time he spent working on the speech (p. 270 & 272).
>
> 3. TOLERANCE/THE DIPLOMAT: A student sees that one well-crafted speech after another, efforts which should carry all before them, rarely win total victory. Other people are hardly ever induced to give up their differentness no matter how well we argue. The student begins to think of what can and cannot be changed in other people. The student recognizes that the key to overcoming difference may lie in thinking about the people who are different rather than about the message designed to shame them in their difference. The tolerant orator hopes to achieve cooperation from the audience. By studying the audience closely, by determining what is dear to them and what is not, the speaker carefully proposes an accommodation which will seem as reasonable to the audience as it does to the speaker (p. 272).

> 4. RELATIVISM/THE SUITOR: Our diplomat...comes to see that there is no conviction which someone is not willing to change. Two paths diverge from here. On the one hand, the diplomat may turn cynic...The cynic notices that rhetoric <u>can</u> induce the abandonment of almost any conviction. To follow the other path, the jaded diplomat notices that rhetoric <u>must</u> induce the acceptance of almost every conviction. The diplomat on the path to relativism sees that the conversation of a culture, managed by public speaking and other rhetorical practices, makes people who they are and therefore makes the world the way it seems to be to those people. Public speaking seeks to change, not just the opinions people have, but the people who are made up out of the opinions, values, beliefs, and commitments which rhetoric manages. Therefore the role of public speaking for the relativist is courtship. The focus of attention is on the relationship between speaker and audience as equal partners in oratorical exploration (p. 273).

What both Brummett and Perry provide us with, I believe, is encouragement. If we approach speaking education as a developmental venture, then we can make some real headway in our classrooms because we are keeping development in mind when we create assignments and activities. By realizing that students are also highly responsible for their own intellectual and ethical development, we are at least cut some slack as teachers. We can at least finally understand why, despite our best efforts, all of our students don't end up at the same place at the same time. Even small moves toward understanding could be significant for some of our younger or more absolutist students.

For those of us who are ethically compelled to address issues of empowerment and diversity in our classrooms, a lot can be gained by exploring this overlap of developmental theory and critical pedagogy. In fact, without labelling it as such, I believe Brummett came across this intersection when he developed

his four stances toward public speaking. Brummett explains that bringing students to the position of relativism may be something only they can do for themselves.

> "But if it can be done, then it can be done by cultural education and communication education. Students can be shown the cultural roots of the convictions which they presently see as absolute and inviolable. The malleable, rhetorical nature of those convictions can be emphasized by studying groups, cultures, or subcultures which do not share those convictions...Public speaking education is therefore a moral education; it cannot be otherwise. For it teaches not just strategy, but how to think about and live with the strange and different others to whom we address our speeches (p. 274)."

CONCLUSION

Critical pedagogy in theory, is wonderful. Critical pedagogy in practice is often uneven, challenging, and even frustrating. But diversity education, has to be worthwhile, if only for ethical reasons. Therefore, it is important that as communication educators we start to look at the application of theory.

Davilla has offered some suggestions for instructors who are trying to instill gender sensitivity into their classrooms. These suggestions seem equally helpful for teachers who are using any type of diversity education. Davilla first asks that both teachers and students become self-aware of their own biases and values by taking a personal inventory. This inventory also helps the instructor to understand that he/she is not solely responsible for creating an egalitarian classroom environment (p. 5). Collaboration can be empowering to teachers and students alike (Davilla).

Instructors can also learn through observation of other instructors. How do our colleagues handle issues of equity in their classrooms? Self-reflection is also important. Beyond asking students to maintain journals of their communication experiences, it is also beneficial for the teacher to keep his/her own daily journal of interactions (Davilla, p. 6-7). By writing in a journal, we can often detect patterns of behavior we might, otherwise, overlook (Davilla).

By exploring the tenets of critical pedagogy and looking for opportunities to incorporate them into our classrooms, we will be doing a service to our communication students. To teach public speaking as if our classroom were a vacuum, is an injustice. Issues of critical pedagogy can be unusually challenging and it is only through practice that we can begin to understand the pluses and pitfalls of approaching public speaking teaching as a diversity exercise. It is unlikely that any of us have been or will be 100 percent successful in our attempts to bring multiculturalism into our classrooms. However, by using developmental theory as an "overlay" for our critical activities, we can better understand our students' successes and failures. This overlay also provides us with the background we need to understand that diversity education is actually a collaborative venture.

> "If we are to do justice to our evolution, we shall need, as never before, a way of transmitting the crucial ideas and skills, the acquired characteristics that express and amplify man's powers. We may be sure that the task will demand our highest talents. I would be content if we began, all of us, by recognizing that this is our task as learned

men and scientists, that discovering how to make something comprehensible to the young is only a continuation of making something comprehensible to ourselves in the first place -- that understanding and aiding others to understand are both of a piece (Bruner, p. 38)."

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